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Integrity

death



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So Lent is a good time for an issue on death. "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return."

In planning this issue we found we had to be highly selective. There is an abundance of "death" material. We could have devoted the entire number to a discussion of undertaking and how it might possibly be reformed, in which case our writers could have waxed satirical like Waugh and delighted our readers no end. For the high cost of undertaking is very pleasant to denounce. Practically everyone is ready to agree it is a racket—even the people who prefer the funeral parlor with the blinking sign "air conditioned," and the ones who criticize Mrs. So-and-So for giving her husband such a cheezy funeral. While we aid and abet him it is very comfortable to pin all the blame on the mortician for degrading death. Yet even if all undertakers completely lost their mercenary streak, would funerals automatically be reformed? Would death become the reality it should be in the Christian life? We doubt it. Something deeper, more drastic has to be changed than the high cost of burial.

This issue attempts to explore the "something deeper"—the reality of death in itself: what it means to die, whether death is something to fear; our attitude toward our own death and the death of those we love. It should be remarked that death is a highly complex reality, and that our reactions to it usually will be far from simple. Well-meaning reformers of prevailing death mores have failed, we think, insofar as they have forgotten this fact. They have, for instance, emphasized the joyful aspect of death—"the going home to heaven"—and forgotten that the widow who exclaims "Alleluia, my husband is dead" either did not love her husband and should be suspected of possible homicide, or is mentally or emotionally deranged. Young apostolic Catholics who talk gleefully of "looking forward to death" indicate that either they are in excellent health and death is a remote possibility beyond the powers of their imaginings, that they have reached that summit of the spiritual life where like the saints "they die because they do not die," or most likely of all, they have not yet attained to that fear which is the beginning of wisdom.

Sorrow and hope, fear and faith, pain of loss and fulfillment of love—all these are in death. Christ Who always saw His Father's face and knew better than anyone the reward of the just still wept that His friend should die, and stopped to restore a son whose life had been lost.

from our readers

"freedom and authority"

To the Editor:

. . . I have no argument with a certain amount of the article (*The Gift of Freedom*, by Jerem O'Sullivan-Barra) which concerns matters I know nothing about. When he gets to the paragraph entitled "Surrender of Conscience to State," however, he begins to speak of military matters, about which I am vitally interested. In this paragraph are statements founded on muddled, sentimental thinking, plus an over-all biased manner of presentation which ill befits a Catholic magazine.

Take first the question of facts: First of all I'd like to know who these millions are who "willingly and easily give up their conscience as they put on a uniform." I haven't; nor have my Catholic friends, insofar, that is, as they think about *anything* or are capable of analyzing situations morally. . . . If the writer would be willing to discuss the matter I can show him that the more nearly a person is in a position to judge rightly in a set of military circumstances, the more possibility there is of influencing the decision (as to its moral aspects, that is). As I will mention in a minute, only the fuzziest thinking decides that *all* bombing is morally wrong.

The next fact I challenge is in the statement, "the fact that so many submitted to it and then irresponsibly carried out without question any orders for mass bombing or blockading that were issued, proves that for many. . . ." Note in passing the slanted manner in which this is presented: "irresponsibly," "any orders," etc.; the whole rest of the paragraph is written in this vein. Who are these "so many" he is talking about? What occasion was there which caused action "without question"? What were these "orders for mass bombing or blockading"? . . .

The fact that he compares shooting hostages with bombing is an over-simplification which in this case is just plain incorrect. He says: "American Catholic aviators were chosen to make a bombing raid on Rome. Certainly some may have considered such a raid immoral, even though ordered by superiors. Not one of the aviators tested the manner in which our government would look on those who refused to obey an order because it violated the dictates of conscience." Is it *bombing* or bombing *Rome* that he objects to? In either case please read the facts,

which I quote from *History of World War II*, Miller, Universal Book and Bible House (not my preferred reference, but reliable):

"The historic attack was not undertaken without the most careful preparations. For months before, the Allies' reconnaissance planes had carefully photographed and mapped every square foot. In the exhaustive 'briefing' that preceded the takeoff, all the air crews were painstakingly instructed in the absolute necessity for utmost precision in bombing. The targets chosen were the San Lorenzo Freight Yards, just outside the main railway station in the southeast part of the city; the Littorio yards on the north edge of the city, and the Ciampino airfield, 4 miles southeast of Rome. Every one of these targets was of the highest military importance, for the capital was the center of a vast rail network on which the Germans depended exclusively for the shipment of men and materials of war to southern Italy and Sicily.

"Every flier was provided with the finest detailed maps on which the targets were clearly delineated; other warning marks set aside every point that might be of the slightest religious significance. The boundaries of Vatican City were heavily pictured; every shrine was identified beyond the least possibility of error. . . . Among the American and British fliers on the mission were many Catholics; all had the opportunity to refuse it without penalty, but none did—and many asked to go; they knew that with all the other precautions, a final warning had been added: No bombs were to be dropped if clouds offered the slightest impediment to visibility over the target."

Note: All targets were bombed successfully; the only undesired effect was "slight damage" to one church immediately adjacent to a target. . . .

It's pleasant to be able to agree with Jerem O'Sullivan-Barra, as I do wholeheartedly in that part of his article entitled "Theology Is Not Finished." He speaks correctly when he says that most people use a theology of war developed in the Middle Ages. I just don't think he applies theology right in these ages. . . .

Geoffrey Cheadle, Major, USAF
Waco, Texas

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' RELIEF FUND - 1956 APPEAL

Laetare Sunday, March 11

This is the tenth occasion on which Catholics of the United States will be asked to contribute to the support of Catholic Relief Services, N.C.W.C., official agency of the hierarchy for relief abroad. Last year the agency helped 32 million people of every race and creed. This collection will be made in your parish church.



Peter Canon

rehearsal for death

Is dying a human act?

Is it normal to be afraid to die?

How can we prepare for death?

*These are some of the questions Father Canon
deals with in this article which attempts to describe
death as an experience for the man facing it
rather than death as a philosophical subject.*

Death is either the end or it is a birthday.

If death is the end it is something which happens to man. It is non-being invading the experience of being, and such an invasion is unimaginable since all man can know is an experience of life—and with death, experience ceases, imagination ceases, because life ceases.

If it is life which gives meaning to death, then this meaning is non-meaning; for when man loses his senses, existence makes no sense since the senses are what gives sense to life. If death means the end, it cannot be experienced. It is the senseless end of the life of the senses. It leads nowhere. If death is the end, to die means suddenly to stop. It is the abrupt approach of *nothing*. Up to this

moment to live meant to strive, to pursue one goal after another, to place one step in front of the other. If death is the end the moment of death means the last step beyond which there is nothing more to reach, a last step with which stepping forward ceases, a last step similar in everything to those which preceded it. Therefore, if death is the end, death is neither a disappointment ("What else did you expect?") nor a frustration. (Life itself is the frustration which death ends.) Death then is not a step into something new—light or peace or rest; it is a ceasing of movement, because not even Buddha can step into nothing. It is during a last step that the end happens to man, that man ceases to be.

Therefore, if death is the end of life, it is totally contrary to life, totally nonunderstandable, because a denial does not teach one anything about the thing that it denies.

The fact that there are people who consider death their personal end and who choose freely to seek death in the service of a cause is no proof of the intrinsic truth of a cause, any more than love is proof of the worth of the thing loved. Martyrdom just proves the sincerity of a conviction and love proves nothing. The thousands (Communists, for example) who die to promote *the cause* neither prove *the cause* true, nor do they give meaning to their death through the promotion of *the cause*. This is either because *the cause* is more than human and therefore dying for *the cause* means to avow that man must be sacrificed for something greater than himself—which implies that man himself makes no sense and death is the end; or *the cause* is that of humanity and then choosing death as one's personal end means to pronounce the death sentence over *the cause*—because what sense does humanity make if man makes no sense?

While Communists have martyrs and modern pantheists and hedonists have none, death is the end no less for those who say that man, ceasing to be himself, begins to be God, than for those who say that man is an animal—because either you become all God or all worms, or your spirit all God and your body all worms. Whichever way, you cease to be human, which seems to be the end of you.

the Christian view of death

But death is a birthday. It is death which gives meaning to life, as birth gives meaning and shape to conception and pregnancy.

The Christian martyr dies to prove his faith in this truth—although he cannot prove the truth itself by his death—and the truth is that man in death awakens to the vision of God. That is more than the human mind can fancy; that in death man is born from the womb of Mother Church into the broad light of the eternal day; that death therefore is a step, and a step very different from those which preceded it. Not the interrupted step of one who ceases to live, not the end of movement because he who moves is no more, but the final step in a long series of steps—the one step which carries man through the door, like the one, only, final step which brings the refugee across the frontier into security. Like the one *yes* at the altar that makes the bride a wife, the last in a long series of similar nods that makes marriage a relationship forever, so the last nod to the will of God makes heaven present at once and forever.

If life is seen under the light of death, dying is not something which happens to man, but something man *does*. How can it be otherwise? Man, who in collaboration with divine grace was to approach his goal with his own forces, man who was to reach the harbor setting his own sail, unless he die by an act of his own will (and consent is not less an act—a decision—of the will than a refusal is) would not be dying as a human being. He would be lifted out of himself without any consent on his part, and death would be a violent, unseemly end to a lifelong collaboration.

death is a human act

If we do not believe in death as the activity of man, we who believe that grace lifts human activity into the realm of the divine without in any way destroying its humanity, we who believe in man's lifelong participation in divine life would deny that the last, the final, the supreme step toward his goal is not a free step of man, but violence imposed upon man by God.

Death cannot be something done to man, but must be something man does; otherwise it would be inhuman. In death man grows to his maturity, and man cannot be grown.

Therefore, if we look at life in time—which means life by little bits, or life losing itself in the past to reach out for itself in the future—death is a passage through a gate within which life will find itself all at once, and that passage must be an act of life. Death must be a deed of man. The supreme decision of man, the

supreme exercise of freedom, the supreme grace given to man, that is, the supremely human act.

Man from the beginning was destined to be capable of this act, to go through time to eternity; therefore it was meant from the beginning that for man there should be a last step which began in time and ended in eternity. The final choice present to man to accept the call of God in an eternal *yes* or freeze in the immobility of an eternal *no*. But man was not meant to die; he was meant to be transformed. His body was meant to be glorified, and his soul was meant to be confirmed in this last act of vision and love in the eruption of God's immediacy. In the beginning soul and body were not meant to be separated from each other; but from the beginning man was meant to come to the end of time, that is, he was meant to make a last free decision after which there would be no decision. And the content of that decision was to be the assent (the *yes*) to God, calling man from time to eternity. So from the beginning man was meant to give his *yes* in the eternal marriage feast freely, at the moment God called.

the coming of death

It is only through sin that this transition acquired the doubly new aspect of a "death." Only since sin came into the world does this transition at the same time mean a separation of body and soul *and* present the situation of a crisis—a choice. The first aspect of death—the tearing apart of man's natural unity—is a punishment for sin. The second aspect of death—the choice presented to man at the final moment to accept the call of God in an eternal *yes* or to freeze in an eternal *no*—is rendered especially terrifying after a life of sin.

Therefore, quite in opposition to the peaceful "passage" of immaculate nature, death is frightening, because it is unnatural: the necessity to die was induced by the free choice of sin. Sin, a rebellion against grace, tearing man apart from God, punished by death, which is violence done to nature, tearing the immortal soul apart from its mortal body.

Those who claim that death is not ugly, that death is only a blessing, that death is not frightening, either do not know what they speak about or refuse to face reality. They either know no theology and therefore say that at death we lose nothing (while St. Thomas

says that we lose the completeness of our personality until the day of the resurrection) or they presume for themselves the *dormitio Mariae*—a death like to the “passage” of Mary.

They do not face the fact that death means supreme privation in the natural order and the supreme test of faith in the supernatural order. Privation, because the world as we know it will be lost to us together with the image we have painted of God. Privation, because our soul made to know and to love through a body will be nakedly at the mercy of God. Test of faith, because without support of the senses and concepts which are familiar we have to venture into His presence. Leaving behind all that we know we have to realize how terribly unknown He really is to us before His immediacy will fill our being.

need we be afraid?

It makes no sense to deny that both these experiences are new and frightening; to say that “perfect love casts out fear,” far from denying the reality of fear makes it more real than any other affirmation could make it: death brought fear into the world.

It would be better to talk in this connection rather of the *fright* of death than of the *fear* of death, because fear is something rational and can be something holy, while the reaction of human wholeness threatened with dissolution is something natural, almost animal. The servile fear of hell which shouts: “Never let me get into that kind of state,” and the filial fear of God which sighs: “Never let me be separated from You; never allow fright or any other creature to tear me from You,” are a great help to the dying; while fright, which has brought some great saints to panic, is the “weather of sin” in which we must die. Although every free decision by its very nature is irrevocable, it is in the weather of this supreme fright that the one irrevocable decision which begins in time and never can be remedied in eternity must be made.

Faced with this double truth that death is the supreme act of man performed in the climate of fright by which man steps from time which is familiar into the unfamiliar nakedness of eternity, leaving his body behind; and that it is man’s lifelong responsibility to prepare for this moment at which God is willing to give him the greatest grace of his life, what can man do during life to pre-

pare for death? Can he plan for it?

Granted that all life is a preparation for death—it is a preparation for so many other things too. Granted that man must always be in the state of grace which is the seed of glory, what should we say about great saints who feared death (and I mean “fear” not “fright”) like St. Francis who knew himself able to deny Our Lord in the end? Granted that we must pray for the grace of a good death—a practice strangely neglected in the Age of Undertakers.

prayer like death

Is there no way of preparing for death by rehearsing? Is there no specific act in everyday life which psychologically or supernaturally has a structure similar to death, so that through its exercise even if we cannot acquire the habit of dying we acquire a habitual preparedness for the part we will have to take in death?

An analysis of the supernatural structure of prayer will show a fundamental parallelism between the role of man in death and in prayer.

Like death, prayer is an act of man under the influence of grace. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Like death, prayer is the venture of man from the known world of the senses into the unknown realm of God. The fact that prayer at the beginning requires a disciplining of the senses so as to stop them from interfering with acts of faith, the object of which is the invisible mystery, is only a proof that prayer essentially implies a mortification of the senses. Just as he will do forever in death, in prayer man tends to leave behind himself the world of body, time and image, and fares out into the light of God which his senses cannot perceive.

Just as for death, so for prayer—it is spiritual poverty which denies itself habitually that makes prayer easy.

As in death, so in prayer the senses rebel. In death, this rebellion of the senses will cause that supreme fright of which we have spoken before. The senses rebel because they sense that their end is near—and since continuity is a law of life, the senses yearn for a continuity which is not theirs. As much as the will may accept death as the punishment of sin, and as much as the will may control the senses, it cannot change that rebellion. In prayer man tries to focus his mind on a mystery his mind cannot see, and his love on

a God Who cannot be touched. For prayer is not an activity of the senses. As much as man may engage his senses by focussing the imagination on a symbol of the truth that his mind wants to penetrate, and his body in a position symbolizing the attitude of his will, the senses do not perform a supernatural act; they do not pray. Therefore, sooner or later the senses will feel a frustration which is an anticipation of death, and sometimes prayer can give a foretaste of the fright of death. Every novice of serious prayer knows this who has ever resisted the impulse to run away in the middle of the appointed hour for meditation, full of disgust and discouragement and confusion.

The parallelism between prayer and death does not stop here: that both are human activities under the influence of grace; both imply a venture into the unknown and a frustration of the senses; for both we are conditioned by spiritual poverty; both are become beautiful under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost; both are an exclusive seeking of the face of God by man.

Both also are threatened by the same temptation. In prayer as in death the tempter says: "Lord, not today; tomorrow I will be ready." Which means: "Lord, I know better than You when Your face may shine upon me."

As if man ever would be able to be ready for the eternal marriage feast!

Man cannot pray and cannot die as long as he is not willing to accept himself as he is now—and as long as he does not humbly accept God deigning Himself to visit him as he is.

Death like prayer is rehearsed and prepared for only in prayer—because though all depends on man's courage to say *yes* and express his readiness whenever God calls, all depends on God's grace giving him the humility to accept himself as he is at that moment.

Accepting One's Death

By a special act of Pius X, on the 9th March 1904, a plenary indulgence was attached "in articulo mortis" to the following prayer, recited after confession and communion—even when in full health long before death.

O Lord, my God, from this moment do I accept from Thy hands, with a quiet and trusting heart, whatsoever death Thou shalt choose to send me, with its pains and griefs.



Elaine Malley

a time for weeping

*How should the Christian react to the loss of
a loved one?
Is grief a sign of rebellion against God?*

The words *love* and *death* are frequently uttered in the same breath. When a person loves he enters into a new life that makes his previous existence seem mere vegetation. It is no longer life but love that has become the vital impulse of his being, motivating every beat of his heart, governing every thought, inspiring every act.

Our whole mode of existence is punctuated with nothingness. "Dust we are—to dust we must return." When love becomes synonymous with life it carries the conviction that only utter extinction can put an end to it.

But, paradoxically, the sheer intensity of love seems to give rise to the thought of death, as if one could not bear the weight of so sweet a burden, but must die of it. In the lower forms of life certain organisms die in the act of reproduction. Romantic young lovers indulge in satisfying daydreams in which they lose their

lives for the loved one. In the ecstasy of the mystic all semblance of life leaves the body. Divine Love Itself felt the need to undergo death for the lost beloved creature, man.

bereavement

What happens when death claims, not the lover, but the beloved? A moving passage in Scripture, recounting David's learning of the death of his son Absalom, gives a classic example of the agony of grief experienced on such an occasion. "The king therefore being much moved went up to the high chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went he spoke in this manner: 'My son Absalom, Absalom my son! Would to God that I might die for thee, Absalom my son, my son Absalom!'"

Bishop Challoner's footnote apologizes for David's strong expression of grief by explaining that David lamented the death of Absalom because of the wretched state in which he died, and that his desire to die for his son was based on a willingness to save his life thereby. This might seem to imply that there is something wrong in such profound grief, or that it is permissible only when the deceased is manifestly in danger of the wrath of God.

Is overwhelming sorrow for the loss of a loved one incompatible with a whole-hearted acceptance of God's will, and with a Christian's faith in the hereafter, in the Redemption, and in a loving all-merciful God?

It is easy in those moments when we are in possession of all our rational faculties, and death has not touched us personally, to think of it dispassionately. When it glares at us wholesale from the headlines of our daily papers we may shake our heads sadly or become indignant over the state of affairs that has occasioned the disaster, but we do not suffer the pain of bereavement. It is even possible to contemplate in theory the death of someone we love dearly, to offer our beloved to God and renounce our joy in him in all sincerity, as long as his death is purely speculative. Sometimes death comes after a long illness, bringing blessed surcease from agony. Or it descends like a benediction upon the aged within whom the flame of life has long flickered feebly and painfully. When we have watched such a one decline day by day while we stand by helpless, it is with a sense of relief and gratitude that we turn him over to the tender mercies of the All-Powerful. He died

to us so gradually that we were able to mourn his death while yet he lived. Compare David's serene resignation to the death of his child by Bethsabee, for whose recovery he had fasted and wept for seven days and nights, with his bitter outcry at the sudden and unforeseen death of Absalom.

Let us not, however, confuse natural resignation over one whose death comes as a welcome release, for one reason or another, with true spiritual detachment. It is good to be able to maintain serenity in the face of misfortune; but unless it is a real misfortune it does not touch the spiritual basis of that serenity. If it *is* a real misfortune—let us not delude ourselves—that serenity is going to be sorely tried. And the occasion of the death of a dear one is no time for self-delusion. St. Thomas says that it is unreasonable to hold that man's only evil is vice. It is permissible for him to mourn the loss of an inferior good, even though it may not be his supreme good. And while death is not the end of life and the separation it causes is only one of the flesh, it is still a real separation. We are human. We have been deprived of an invaluable treasure that lightened the burden of our earthly sojourn. Let us face our deprivation in all humility and honesty. Let us not be afraid to acknowledge our sorrow. St. Thomas does not find sorrow incompatible with virtue. "Immoderate sorrow is a disease of the soul, but moderate sorrow is the mark of a well-disposed soul, according to the present state of life."

a clue from St. Augustine

Just what separates moderate sorrow from immoderate sorrow is hard to say from its external manifestation. Much depends on individual temperaments and personal habitudes as well as on communal mores. St. Augustine provides a clue in his description of two deaths which he mourned. He confesses to suffering, before his conversion, immoderate sorrow for the death of a dear friend. It is interesting to contrast this experience with what he felt when his mother died, after he had embraced the true faith.

His friend's death plunged him, in the nakedness of his godlessness, into the depths of utter destitution. His heart, he declares, was black with grief. He was engulfed by the emptiness of loneliness. The world in which his friend no longer breathed was blighted for him. He was brought face to face with an inner

wretchedness of soul that he realized had been there even before his loss. He was tormented by feelings of guilt because he could not bring himself to share his friend's fate. And he prolonged his torments deliberately; for as long as he could taste them he felt he was not wholly alone.

When his mother died he felt again a terrible weight of sorrow. He admits that because he had lost the great comfort of her presence his soul was wounded and his very life was torn asunder. He lays bare all the tangled and involved feelings that assailed him: deep grief over the newness of the wound; remorse for the trouble and anxiety he had caused her; shame that he could be shaken by such grief. But he was able to control his tears until he could be alone with God. There, in His sight, he wept about his mother and for her, and about himself and for himself. Once solaced, he went about the business of his life, expressing his love for his mother, not in futile lamentation of his loss, but in fervent prayers for her soul.

retreat from reality?

Even before his conversion, St. Augustine had a healthy, robust mind. Three evils were spared him in the most painful of his bereavements: he did not despair; he did not rebel against the inevitable; and he did not attempt to hide from the reality of his situation as it appeared to him. Our generation breeds sicklier souls. Many of us who profess the faith may find that its radiance can be obscured and well-nigh obliterated by the vibrations of a present anguish. This is partly due, I think, to the dynamic materialism that permeates our thinking. It creates in us a tendency to feel that we are in the driver's seat with regard to our own destinies—that we are the masters of our fate. When something happens over which we have no control we are apt to be thrown into confusion. We are tempted to rebel or despair. Being Christians, however, we know we must reject such feelings. Our very grief frightens us because it seems to imply a resistance to God's will. There appears to be only one way out of this conflict: retreat from reality. Death, to be made acceptable, must be decked out in false sweetness and light. The deceased, who is causing so much inner turmoil, must be dismissed; so he is turned into an angel. His memory is tortured out of all semblance to what he really was.

The Church indulges in no such flights of fancy. She opens her arms to her beloved departed member and cradles him in a last embrace. Someone has spoken of the holy water which is sprinkled over his body as the "tears of the Church." She faces the mortality of human existence without subterfuge, even though it symbolizes for her a more terrible mortality—that of the soul through sin. This insight causes her to bow down in profound fear. She depicts, in no mincing terms, the awful judgment her child is facing, seeing in it a figure of the final judgment. And she prays, over and over again, for the life of his soul. She offers her sorrow humbly for him. "For if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings Thou wilt not be delighted. A sacrifice, to God, is a troubled spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Underlying her sorrow, and rising from time to time to mitigate it, is her unswerving faith in the mercy of God, in the resurrection of the body, and in the merits of the Savior and His saints. There is no conflict here. Her serenity is part of her being, for she is the Bride of Christ, indissolubly knit to Him. She knows she cannot lose His peace by allowing herself to be racked on His Cross.

social conventions

But the concern of the Church is not only with the deceased. It is also with the bereaved. And it is partly for this reason that, in her age-old wisdom, she tends to look with favor on the social conventions with which people surround the occasion of death: the wakes, the visits, the giving and accepting of condolences, the pathetically superfluous tribute of flowers; for she knows that engagement in these preoccupations often serves to tide the bereaved over the numbness of the first shock of his loss, until such time as he is able to face it. Some of those who criticize the formal trappings of funerals are unconsciously transferring to their impatience with the demands of usage an unadmitted horror of death and an unwillingness to accept it.

The tendency today is to push the thought of death to the furthest limits of consciousness, to try to cover its fathomless black waters with a surface of ice. But in reality it surrounds us at every moment. Paul Louis Landsberg, in his *Experience of Death*, calls it an absent presence. Everything that lives is dying. When a loved

one dies that absence is made present. The dead beloved becomes a present absence. In his death we mourn a part of ourselves that has died with him. In our love for him we grasped his uniqueness in its ineffable quality. We shared with him a tightly-knit community of interests called "we." On his death we are given an experimental knowledge of our own mortality. Something of us dies, too.

At the same time we are given an experimental knowledge of our essential incompleteness. We need love to fulfill us. For most of us the love of God is a matter of the will. Our capacity to feel is only glancingly involved. We can emerge from meditation on Christ's sufferings and death dry-eyed. But if we will, He will accept the tears that we shed for our dead beloved, His stricken image, for all the times we have been unable to weep for Him.

the sources of tears

We do not have to understand or unravel all the complex and conflicting sources of our tears at this time. In fact, it would be unwise to do so. Many of them stem, it is true, from fear of the future, which looms so bleak and empty after a past rich with shared experience. Before us stretches a lifetime of going on alone, only half alive. Many of our tears spring from self-reproach over failings in our relationship—failings which can never be righted now. But some of them well up out of the dark subterranean caverns of our subconscious. And some of them have spiritual origins. In the darkness of our desolation Christ is sharing His Passion with us. We are plunged into an abyss of mystery.

However, we do not have to clutch at our serenity to keep it. He who desires to hold on to serenity for its own sake has already lost it. God, in Whose hand we lie, knows the dark tempest that is convulsing us. In His own good time He Himself will console us with the peace that passes understanding. It is only by accepting the travail of our own "troubled spirit," just as it is, and offering it to Him as the only sacrifice we are able to make, that we can grow to a deeper understanding of His will for us.

He Whose delight it was to call Himself the Son of Man also underwent the pain of loss in the death of His friend Lazarus. "And Jesus wept."



Barry Ulanov

death in the arts

*Artists seem to interpret the attitude of their
particular age toward death.'*

*What do the great poets, composers and painters have
to tell us about death?*

Much of the weight and wisdom of a society may be discerned from its attitudes toward death. If it trembles and quakes, stutters and starts at the mention of death, indeed makes every effort to avoid thinking, talking or reading about the subject, then, to the extent that any generalization about a society may be made with confidence, it may be said of this hypothetical one that it is immature, weak at the foundation, and by definition of poor spirits. If it moves toward the inevitable—its death and the death of its individual members—with something approaching confidence, ease, and acceptance, then it may be said of this enviable civility that it has made its peace with God and found that balance of the here and now with the hereafter without which any maturity in a society is quite impossible.

How do we learn about any given society's attitudes toward death? One way, I suppose, is to examine the stories in which death figures in the daily newspapers, the weekly and monthly magazines, and at the same time to look at the advertisements of the funeral parlors and cemeteries in the streets and trains and

alongside the great highways. Another is to engage people at every level of that society in discussions about death. Still another is to watch, with some special awareness, the treatment of death in the popular arts, the mass media: the motion pictures, television, the comic books, if we are to speak of our civilization; the theatre, the street fairs, if we are concerned with an earlier one; the jousts of the gladiators, the religious festivals, if we are looking into one much earlier still.

death attitudes in America

All these methods make sense; much is to be learned about death from each of them. In our time, for example, we should quickly glean from the ads that death, like refrigerators and television sets, can be paid for on the installment plan; from conversation and from the newspapers and magazines, that death bloody and violent and effected by means more or less novel is of much greater interest than death natural or achieved through illness more or less familiar; from the popular arts, as from talk and the periodicals, that death, dull, unimaginative, in bed (hospital or home) is only rivalled for lack of public interest by birth, dull, unimaginative, in bed (hospital or home). These insights, real as they may be, lack finality however. They offer little more than a quasi-statistical approach toward the death attitudes of twentieth-century America; they fail to reveal the thought processes of Americans about death. For the fuller, the more profound penetration into these attitudes, one must turn to the poets, the painters, and the composers. With the priest in the confessional or dispensing the viaticum and the psychiatrist probing the various imbalances, neurotic and psychotic, in which death may figure, the artist shares the knowledge of a society's innermost feelings and convictions about death. But unlike the priest or the psychiatrist the artist is not bound by any seal that encloses his confidences and makes his very substantial knowledge secret.

It is to artists then that I suggest we should turn to discover man's thinking about death. It is to the arts that we should go, not necessarily to learn how to behave in the face of death, but at least to observe how others have behaved and from that observation to take courage or at the very least to be protected, as some knowledge can protect one, from the fears which have beset so many at

the approach of death. In a poem, in a drama, in an allegorical painting or a musical setting of the Requiem Mass; in a phrase here, an image there, a cadence somewhere else may be found just that extension of revelation which has so often made art the valuable ancillary of theology. Indeed, it is my own central conviction as I write this article that in the arts may be found a truth about death by no means unknown to theology, but one perhaps too frequently neglected, and that it is to the arts that we must turn to be reminded of this truth about death and through it of a very basic truth about our lives.

death personalized

Beyond everything else, what one learns from arts and artists is that there is no one way to accept or reject death. While it is hardly true that there are as many ways to think about death, or to deal with it, as there have been poems or paintings or mystical compositions in which death plays a leading role, it is—one learns from a Shakespeare, a Dante, a Donne, a T. S. Eliot, a Yeats; from a Verdi, a Mozart, a Brahms, a Berlioz, a Liszt, a Messiaen, a Schoenberg; from a Titian, a Durer, a Picasso—an incontrovertible fact that death has occupied much of the thinking of the pre-eminent artists of Western civilization. In their thinking about death these artists have again and again revealed what it is that makes them significant in their societies. It is one of the special—and not at all unhappy—ironies of our lives that in the vast levelling process which is death many men assert their individualities most vigorously. In this assertion, in this irony, lies eternal truth. We are, we remain, individuals from here to eternity. In each man's going, as in each one's coming, no matter how many may perish with him, is recorded one single and unique life, precious for itself and to itself and so marked by its Creator. The corollary of this great truth is that each of us must think very seriously about death; whether we question it or answer it or stand aside from it in bewilderment, thought must precede action.

death in Dante

The enormous size an artist's thinking about death may assume is best exemplified by the work Dante Alighieri called his *Com-*

media, a comedy because of its supremely happy ending in Paradise. It is, of course, entirely around the subject of death that this astonishing allegory of divine judgment and eternal transfiguration is constructed. To some extent it is the conversion into a poet's multifaceted metaphor of the revelations of the Church concerning the rewards of heaven and the punishments of hell, and the purgation that must ultimately yield one the first and spare one the second. At least as much as that, however, it is the translation into epic terms of a poet's very personal faith in the love of human beings, the love of one for another which is charity, which is motivated by love of God and directed entirely toward Him. It is, essentially, Dante's unassailable faith in the power to intercede for him in heaven of his blessed beloved after her death that gives his work its narrative strength, not simply because it is she interceding for him, but because in so doing she acts out for the reader the poet's conviction that we find our beatitude in a demonstrated love of neighbor for the sake of God. All through the *Comedy* properly called *Divine* by an enthusiastic critic years after Dante's own death, it is this relationship of man to man that is configured by the personages—saints and sinners, angels and devils, men of good will and men of malice—who populate heaven, hell, and purgatory. It is this offering, at once dedicated and disinterested, which Dante acknowledges in those touching words with which he bids Beatrice farewell after she has left him in the hands of St. Bernard, two cantos before the end of the *Commedia*:

O Lady in whom my hope has its strength and who didst bear for my salvation to leave thy footprints in hell, of all the things that I have seen I acknowledge the grace and the virtue to be from thy power and from thy goodness. It is thou who hast drawn me from bondage into liberty by all those ways, by every means for it that was in thy power. Preserve in me thy great bounty, so that my spirit, which thou hast made whole, may be loosed from the body well-pleasing to thee.

And thus does Dante pass on to confront the Queen of Heaven—she for whom "her faithful Bernard" is "all on fire with love," even as Dante is enflamed with devotion to Beatrice, and by analogy to Bernard's great lady and the Lord both serve—and the assemblage of the saints gathered together in the mystic Rose of Paradise.

Through the mediation of Beatrice, the clearest possible "type" or "figure" of Mary, Dante finally sees the Eternal Light of God Himself. In His love—"the love that moves the sun and the other stars"—life and death both achieve meaning, purposeful order, a place in the design of eternity in which death is served by life and both serve God.

the Christian tradition

At its best, then, death brings the happiness of heaven with some immediacy; but between this bounty and its worst, eternal damnation, the death of the Christian poets offers much consolation. It can bring surcease to a life lived too much in the world, not enough apart from it, and such surcease will be reward enough for the moment, as it is for tortured old King Lear. "O, let him pass!" the Earl of Kent says in one of the very last speeches of Shakespeare's great meditative drama about life and death: "He hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him out longer."

Death can also bring unspeakable punishment. That is the terror that haunts Hamlet as he plots revenge. That is the point of that much misinterpreted soliloquy—the most famous of Shakespeare's speeches—in which Hamlet names "the rub": "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come . . . must give us pause." And because he fears hell it is more than a passing irony which prompts him to conclude his musing and begin his exchange with Ophelia with the request that she remember "all my sins" in her prayers.

The theme is the central one; the illustrations, necessarily, are many. One can find, with very little investigation, the parallel passages to Dante's on Beatrice: Petrarch's on his lady Laura (it is worth remembering that in Italian one salutes such a lady as "madonna"); John Donne's lengthy lamentations in the two "Anniversary" poems for Elizabeth Drury, the child of his patron, who died at the age of fifteen ("She, shee is dead; shee's dead; when thou knowst this, Thou knowest how lame a cripple this world is."); Geoffrey Chaucer's *Boke of the Duchesse*, in which his Beatrice is Blanche of Lancaster, the dead first wife of John of Gaunt. Eternal punishment, the dreadful judgment of a just God, has its poetry too, from Dante's *Inferno*, through Hamlet's cautioning vision, to the hell of the London underground and overground of the first of

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton," the subway hell, literally on earth, which belches its victims forth across "the gloomy hills of London," an "Eructation of unhealthy souls into the faded air . . ."

That is the Christian tradition. If one turns away from it, one finds little enough. Among the pre-Christian pagans, the sketchiest notion of a Hades, of Elysian Fields, of Islands of the Blest, must suffice, yielding the reader perhaps a certain fantasy of peace and hope, but nothing of much consolation for the mind dissatisfied by illusion and uncertainty. Among the moderns who would be pagans again if only their environment, their education, their vocabularies permitted, there is something worse than fantasy. They offer the paradigms of futility, the conjugations and declensions of which make up many of Yeats's poems ("Man," he says with painful emptiness, "has created death.") and those of others too numerous and too hollow to mention.

the insights of the giants

And as with poetry, so too with painting and with music. The insights of the giants are those of a revealed religion, the revealed religion. No scene so stirred the Renaissance painter's imagination as the Crucifixion; across his canvases he painted every thinkable view of the Cross, the Crucified, and the symbols of one world lost and another found—the voyage of the Passion—skulls and demons and broken cities, whole men and angels and rebuilt and newly built civilizations. In his Pietàs, in his portraits of Mary at the foot of the Cross, of the Descent and the Burial and the Resurrection, this painter painted a biblical narrative and a contemporary message, writing across that death and rebirth the potential rebirth of all who looked at his paintings and learned. When, as Michelangelo did in the Sistine Chapel, he painted the miserable huddled in shuddering unbelief at the hand of Christ raised in the Last Judgment, he did so with compassion; in his belief he suffered the next thing to the punishment he painted, as he pondered the fate of those of bad will. By contrast, the life that chatters to us from Greek vases and Egyptian friezes and the death that makes so little communication to us from the corpse-littered canvas of Picasso's "Guernica" seem shallow affairs indeed, hardly worthy of the vast efforts that went into their making.

In music one meets a death severely personalized. This may be a signal limitation to those for whom death, even more than life, must follow a prescribed pattern, its emotions dominated by piety, its rite elected by tradition, with chance, as represented by the human personality, as rigorously denied the occasion as Eris, the Goddess of Discord, was the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. But, I would insist here, the human personality will, like Eris, obtude, and when it has Mozart or Verdi or Brahms as surrogate, it will not, I am convinced, be thought out of place by many. Certainly the view of death melodramatically set forth by Berlioz in his *Symphonie Fantastique* partakes too much of what has been called "the romantic agony" to be altogether convincing or comforting; the march to the scaffold with the strains of the *Dies Irae* dancing along in the background, like the wild humors of Liszt's *Todtentanz*, suggests a parody of the lugubrious more than a serious meditation upon the subject of death. In the majestic Mozart *Requiem*, however, or the superbly measured *German Requiem* of Brahms, there is much to hold one and to instruct and to reinforce. In the calm reflection of Oliver Messiaen's *Ascension* there is a great meditative strength. In Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* there is the power of high tragedy and an Old Testament stolidity in the face of tragic death. Even the temblors that Verdi unleashes in his *Requiem*, as much a political pamphlet with notes doing the work of words as a setting for a Mass in memory of Alessandro Manzoni—even they reflect some significant thinking and feeling about death motions patently of the soul concerned about the afterlife—although motions now and then uncomfortably attuned in splendor or in horror to the exaggerations of the operatic stage.

a biblical commentary

There is, it seems to me, a plea implicit in these various works of art, a plea for understanding, a plea for appreciation, a plea for wisdom and strength and comfort. The understanding they ask for is the understanding of the human personality in all its confounding, confusing, and compelling variety, nowhere more various or more sympathetic than in death. The appreciation they demand is of the particular approach they have made to death, the special revelation upon which they have concentrated. The wisdom and strength and comfort they seek are, altogether, the substance of the

words of that beatitude which is most directly concerned with death: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." What these artists have written or painted or composed, when these are their pleas, is a biblical commentary which, like all other commentaries of size or value, returns again and again with an all-consuming ardor and most marvelous richness of communication, to the biblical text itself.

Litany for the Dead

... from the Byzantine liturgy

Deacon: Have mercy on us, O God, according to Your great mercy, we pray to You, hear us and have mercy.

Choir: Lord, have mercy (*Three times*).

Deacon: Let us pray also for the repose of the soul(s) of the departed servant(s) of God, NN., and for the forgiveness of their (his, her) every transgression, deliberate and indeliberate.

Choir: Lord, have mercy (*Three times*).

Deacon: May the Lord God make their (his, her) soul(s) to rest where the righteous rest.

Choir: Lord, have mercy (*Three times*).

Deacon: The mercies of God, the kingdom of heaven and the remission of (his, her) sins let us ask of Christ, our immortal King and our God.

Choir: Grant it, O Lord.

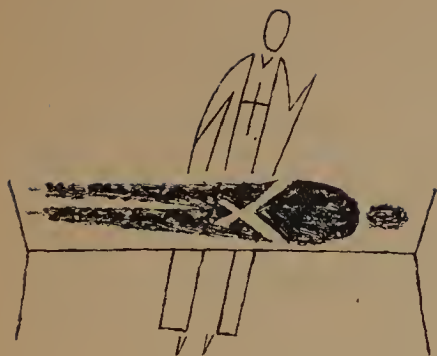
Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

Choir: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: God of spirits and of all flesh, who have trampled on death and vanquished the devil and given life to Your world, give rest, O Lord, to the soul(s) of Your departed servant(s), NN., in a place of light, a place of refreshment, a place of repose, from which pain, sorrow and sighing have fled. Because You are so good and love mankind, forgive their (his, her) every offense, whether in word or deed or thought; for there is no man living and never will be who does not sin: but You alone are without sin, Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness and Your word is truth.

For You are the resurrection and the life and the repose of your departed servant(s), NN., O Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and always and for ever and ever.

Choir: Amen.



George H. Tavard, A.A.

sacrament of the sick

Most Catholics look on extreme unction as a last resort.

*This article is an illuminating
account of the reaction to this sacrament throughout
the history of the Church.*

To the mind of many modern Christians, to think of death is morbid; to speak of it is in bad taste. This would look very strange to an impartial observer. Is not Christianity focused on the death of a Man? To speak of illness is also bad form. Yet is not the New Testament filled with references to "all sorts of diseases"? On the other hand, given this recoil at the mention of death, it seems strikingly out of tune that we should reserve a sacrament, for all practical purposes, for the dying. Whatever theologians have to say against this practice, the unction of the sick, that we now call "extreme" unction, is in fact conferred on the dying and hardly ever on anyone else. To suggest its reception to a person stricken with a sickness that is not highly dangerous would probably be taken amiss, as though it was a hint that the patient might die.

There was a time when Christians adopted an entirely different approach to these things. The early Middle Ages did not fear death as we do. Various forms of plague, feudal wars and banditry were too well known visitors for men to be unfamiliar with the daily event of dying. Diseases of the most ugly provided a usual spectacle when one entered a church of any importance; the beggars of the area used to gather there, exhibiting their malformations. Little by little, popular culture became so used to this that death became a topic for sophisticated painters and writers. The death-dance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is famous. It was the outcome of a long preparation in constant contact with corpses. God's acre, surrounding the village church, and itself surrounded by the dwellings of the living, held a great cultural significance; the dead and the living are in close communion, the communion of the saints, thanks to the mercy of God. The living accordingly like to have their dead within walking distance of their home. They stop by the graves when they go in and out of the church, leaving a few flowers as a token of their visit.

Yet there was no special sacrament for the dying. Dying was too familiar for that. Just before dying, a good Christian received the sacrament of penance for the last time. On their deathbed public sinners were reconciled with the Church through the same sacrament. The Eucharist was also received as a viaticum, as a food that would last through our journey to eternity following the guiding angel who was to see that we were thoroughly purified before being admitted into the presence of God. Reception of the sacrament of the sick as preparatory to this last communion did not spread widely before the eleventh century. Until that time the unction that we now administer to the dying was commonly received for any disease. A good woman who had hurt her finger cutting wood could well go to the priest and ask for a little of the "oil for the sick." He would, or even she herself would, apply it to the wound, with or without a prayer over it. St. Caesarius, who was Bishop of Arles in Southern Gaul in the sixth century, again and again warns his flock not to call in the pagan wizards who claim to heal all ailments; why have recourse to instruments of the devil, when we Christians have an oil, blessed by the Bishop, which alleviates the sickness of the soul and of the body?

The sacrament of the sick was for the living. When they wanted to find a scriptural justification for such a sacrament, the

scholars could quote the Epistle of St. James: "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man; and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him..." They could also refer to Christ's pity on the sick. Since they knew that it is much greater to cure the soul than to cure the body, the oil for the sick could be administered for the forgiveness of sins as well as for healing. This would vary from diocese to diocese. But one point was common to all: the unction was for the living, not for the dying. As for the dead, there were many who thought that a good Christian funeral could be considered their own sacrament; did it not signify, with its rites and prayers, the journey of the dead to heaven? A sacrament is a sign of something supernatural. At a time when the list of the sacraments was not very well ascertained, this was a good way of making a funeral a truly religious event.

change in attitude

The present popular misunderstanding of the sacrament of the sick results from a long evolution. Toward the end of the eleventh century, this unction with oil was administered together with the last penance and the last communion. With time, Christian sensibility made it inseparable from the thought of death. It was given less and less for ordinary ailments. Today it is common for a priest to meet Catholics who do not wish to receive (extreme) unction, for the alleged reason that they do not want to die yet. What had been at first a token of health for the soul and the body has been degraded into an omen of death.

This implies a complete oblivion of the Christian meaning of sickness and of death.

Such an evolution has not taken place without losses to our appreciation of the sacramental order. A recovery of the meaning of the sacrament of the sick should normally open the way to a renewed Christian attitude toward suffering and death.

In the Old Testament disease was commonly believed to be a punishment for sin. Christ Himself was asked by His disciples: "Rabbi, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" This was a perfectly natural question, on which the

rabbis would exercise their sagacity. As for death, it meant oblivion, going down to the "house filled with dust" where the shades of the dead lead an obscure and joyless existence.

The meaning of illness and of death changed with the New Testament. For at the advent of Christ the power of the devils and of sin was conquered. Sickness and death no longer belong to demons. For Christ has Himself mastered suffering and death by undergoing them. Death is absorbed in His Resurrection. As for suffering it is transformed into obedience: "Whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and being consummated, He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation" (Epistle to the Hebrews). In the sacrament of the sick the Savior takes our sufferings upon Himself and unites us to the obedience with which He bore His Passion.

All the sufferings that we may experience are therefore bearable. For they were all assumed by the Person of the Son of God when He suffered His Passion on earth. The Passion was not only a cruel torture imposed on Our Lord by His tormentors. The sentimental piety that dwells on this aspect of it is likely to forget its more important dimensions. For the Passion was also the free acceptance of all the sorrows that would mar the happiness of mankind; it was the welcome of all the pangs of pain and anguish that would throw their shadow across the life of the members of His Mystical Body. The Lord suffered all our diseases and illnesses by anticipation and our own suffering is in turn a privileged appeal to take part in His own life. The Lord that we receive in the sacrament of the unction is precisely the Suffering Servant prefigured in the Book of Isaias. He is the suffering Messiah, Who brings us the grace of becoming saviors also through union with Him.

Christian meaning of suffering

As it ought to be understood and practiced, the sacrament of the sick throws light on the mystery of human suffering. Why do we have to undergo sorrows of soul and pains of body? Why can we not go through life without meeting the darkening shadows of sickness and suffering?

The disciples of Emmaus entreated the Lord: "Stay with us a while, for it is growing dark." Like the darkness of dusk the darkness of sorrow creates an atmosphere which is particularly favorable

to spiritual exchange. When the soul is conscious of undergoing deep pain, when the body is torn by suffering, we meet the One Who was called "the man of sorrow." He enters into communion with us. He tries to impart to His creature something of the strength with which He went through the Passion. He opens to us the secret anguish which also tore His heart long before the soldier's lance pierced it.

If this is the Christian meaning of suffering, then the sacrament of the sick fulfills a still higher function. It is indeed meant to help us restore our health of body and of soul. It also crowns suffering. It is the sacramental consecration of man as sharer in the Passion of Christ. When we receive the Eucharist, Our Lord brings us the fruits of His sacrifice. When we receive the unction, He comes to us with the prayer and anxiety of His agony.

The modern undertones of the word *agony* are misleading here. It evokes tortures, pessimism, fatality. The Gospels, however, do not present the agony in the garden as despair. On the contrary, *factus in agonia prolixius orabat*: "being in agony He prayed the more fervently." In the sacrament of the unction to the sick, the Lord in agony prays in our name. To those who also take upon themselves a part in that prayer is the beatitude addressed: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." To them also are spoken the words of the Lord: "Come to Me, all you who are suffering and afflicted, and I will give comfort to you." Come to Me, and let Me come to you, for when the priest anoints you with oil, I anoint you with the oil of grace, with the grace that brings light and heat to the darkness and cold of pain.

Whatever may be said of the value of suffering in a Christian perspective, the human body recoils from it. This is normal. The opposite would be a very unhealthy perversion. The human mind accordingly is prompt to hope against hope that suffering will be overcome. When known means fail, it dreams of unknown ones. This explains the close connection of witchcraft and medicine in primitive civilizations. The success of quacks and the remnants of superstition in our societies may be traced to it. The expectation of miracles, the longing for extraordinary interventions of God on our behalf is frequent among Christians. Yet it distorts the right notion of the supernatural, if it confuses it with the "extraordinary." It marks the passage from pure faith to imagination.

An inordinate desire for miracles is condemned by Jesus Him-

self. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; and a sign shall not be given to it but the sign of Jonas the Prophet." In New Testament language a sign means a miracle. The only sign given to faith is the three days separating the death of Christ from His Resurrection. All others are superfluous. To seek others is the work of a generation that is adulterous insofar as it is not satisfied with the Covenant as passed between God and His People.

hankering after miracles

The thirst for the extraordinary is equally condemned in the Catholic tradition. The following text of St. John of the Cross concerning visions applies also to man's hankering after miracles: "I declare that all those imaginary conceptions and visions, or any kind of representation, under any particular form, figure or knowledge, must not be for the mind an impediment or an attraction, whether they are false and come from the devil, or they are true and come from God. . . . The soul must focus attention on what is not seen and does not reach the senses, on what is spiritual and cannot fall under sense-perception. . . . The mind must remain in the dark until the day of the clear vision of God in the other life." A mind that is not satisfied with faith and its darkness seeks for a vision and its clarity. Whether a vision is in fact from God or from the devil, no attention must be paid to it, for it is inferior to faith. This is the unequivocal doctrine of the "mystical doctor" of the Church.

Likewise the same mind, unsatisfied with the risk of faith, seeks for a miracle. Disagreeing with the humbleness of the human condition, it looks for a miraculous escape from it. When a person is sick, his mind does not daydream of the miracles that could cure him, if he is content with dwelling, like everybody else, in the obscurity of faith. In this situation faith accepts the trial which one has to undergo, leaving all things to God. To think that we have a right to a miracle is an act of pride that wants to bring God down to our level. In the natural realm man's true attitude is to have recourse to science; for grace respects nature and its possibilities. In the supernatural realm the Church's answer to the anguish of sickness is a sacrament. She brings the same solution to all the main crises in human life. Sacraments have nothing to do with miraculous cures.

joy in expectation

In this sacramental perspective, death itself is far from being the humiliating sort of experience the embellishment of which ensures the prosperity of funeral parlors and of cemeteries.

The Roman martyrology, which is read during the office of Prime in monasteries, refers to the day of death as *dies natalis*, which means the day of birth. For on that day we are born to eternal life. Significantly, Christmas, the anniversary of the birth of the Lord, is also called *dies natalis* (whence *Noël* in French, *Natale* in Italian). Man's birth to Paradise and Christ's birth on earth are closely related. We are born to heaven only because Christ was born on earth. When we die, our Christmas joy becomes reality.

The Fathers of the Church speak of the joy of the soul at the moment of her death, when she meets the angels that will lead her to Paradise. Our present liturgy of the dead refers also to the angels and their hymns. The preface evokes the "hope of our eternal beatitude." The "certainty of having to die" is counterbalanced by the "promise of future immortality." In anticipation we then join the liturgy of the angels, singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. . . ." Surely, this is not the attitude of persons appalled at the thought of death. The note of sadness is not forgotten. But it was well immersed in the joyful thrill of expectation until the endless *Dies Irae*, introduced toward the end of the twelfth century, upset the balance. In some of our parishes the *Dies Irae* is the only sung part of a Requiem Mass and sadness prevails throughout. This is the opposite of what the liturgical texts imply.

In the spirit of the Church, the preparation for death should not be marked by gloom and horror. This belongs to emotionalism rather than to religion. In a religious community of my acquaintance a "meditation" on death is read every first Friday of each month; it begins with: "When my feet will be cold, when my ears will not hear. . . ." A morbid imagination has here been substituted for the theological virtues. How abnormal this is we can see by comparison with the three sacraments that prepare for death. These are not gloomy at all. The unction unites us in our sickness with the Suffering Servant of God Who is our Redeemer. Penance brings us the good tidings of the forgiveness of sins. Communion

increases our participation in the Mystical Body of Christ. All three infuse strength and joy by anticipating our encounter with our Father Who is in heaven.

Sadness belongs neither to the dying nor to the dead. It belongs to the living who are left behind. But this sadness of the living has distorted the Church's prayer for the dead. In the Litany of the Saints the Church prays that we may be spared a "sudden and unprepared death." Yet "he did not notice he was dying" is now considered a great consolation. Our too common fear of the so-called "last" sacraments is in the same line: they might bring the thought of death to the mind of the dying person. We prefer to convince patients that they cannot die yet. Not to take any chance, we also like to deny the fact that we are sick when we actually are far from healthy. Not only is it in bad taste to admit it; it could also perhaps undermine our resistance to the virus. Thus the sacrament of the sick cannot regain the popularity it once had; to ask for the unction we must at least admit we need it.

It is clear that the whole weight of modern civilization is opposed to a rediscovery of the meaning of the sacrament of the sick. Our trust in doctors, hospitals, surgery, hygiene, naturally tends to take disease completely out of the realm of the supernatural. Yet there is a fundamental fallacy here. For if sickness is to be accounted for by natural causes, it retains, like everything created, a supernatural dimension. It occasions an encounter with the Lord, a participation in His suffering, an anticipation of the dissolution of all things that will prelude their renovation. As such, sickness is the fitting framework for the reception of a special sacrament that brings us the reality of which the present world and its frailty are only a shadow.

If civilization is at odds with Christianity, we have to change civilization. It is not Christianity that is mistaken. For civilization is founded on the human mind, while Christianity is grounded in Revelation.

purgatory

Speaking of Revelation an objection may come up at this point. The average man does not go straight to heaven. We may assume that he goes to purgatory first. And this would perhaps justify the fear of death and the gloom of funerals. It may also

be responsible for the postponement of the unction for the sick until the very last minute: the unction would then be an ultimate help, administered when nothing else can work any longer. Yet this rests on a misunderstanding.

In the first place, had the unction for the sick been received in due time when we were ill (and not reserved for the last agony), we would presumably be a better candidate for purgatory. For the sacrament would have had a chance to profit us.

In the second place, purgatory as such need not be feared. The Fathers of the Church refer to it as to a second baptism, a "baptism of fire," given by the angels to those who die with the stains of sin on themselves. As this takes place in a world which is not our tri-dimensional universe, purgatory cannot properly be evaluated in terms of our time, by reference to days, months and years. This is no more than a manner of speaking. Theologians use it when they condescend to assist our imagination in a domain where imagination is at a loss. But it should not be taken literally. Purgatory is in reality the final preparation to see God. As such it is no more to be feared than this life, and probably far less. It should inspire happiness rather than dread.

From whatever angle we look at it (from that of the sacrament of the sick, of the liturgy, or of purgatory) death is the source of a deep happiness for the Christian who "walks by faith" rather than by imagination. For everything that went before is summed up in it; and everything that will be after is anticipated there. Christ the Great Judge is also Christ the Savior. He is with us in the sacraments. We are assumed in His Body. We are assisted by His Spirit.

After a decadence that has lasted several centuries, the liturgical movement has no doubt a great deal to do before the sacrament of the sick is properly restored and the liturgy of the dead is again widely understood. Progress has to be slow in a field where emotionalism has loaded the issue. Yet we should recover the joy of St. Francis when he sang:

"Praised be my Lord for our sister, the bodily death,
from the which no living man can flee.
Woe to them who die in mortal sin;
blessed those who shall find themselves in Thy most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no ill."



"I hate to disturb you
in what you are doing . . ."

"That's quite all right,
it wasn't very important."

"Oh—
that's too bad—"
says Death.

Marion Mitchell Stancioff

authority begins at home

*In our issue on Freedom and Authority we were unable
to include this article.*

*Since we think it is a necessary one if the
discussion on the subject is to be complete, we are
allowing it to intrude into this issue on Death.*

An author is one who creates. Authority is the right of the creator over his creation. And it is of three kinds: God's, as maker of the world—vested in the Church; parents', as procreators of children—exercised directly or through teachers; society's, as molder of the State—vested in its appointed agents.

Though the second form is our present concern, a look at the third will be enlightening.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us that civil authority is natural to man, because it is natural for him to live in society and there is no civil society without authority. Civil authority is truly of God, because God is the author of nature and nature requires that order which authority alone confers. But there are limits to the competence of the civil authority and limits therefore to civil obedience. The State cannot command what God forbids. (This is true of the other two authorities also. If a parent or a bishop were to give an immoral order, it could not be obeyed.) But a command may without being immoral be beyond the authority which enacts it. In this case compliance is not a matter of obedience but of prudence. (Prudence caused Galileo's submission to a judgment which was arbitrary because outside the scope of the judge's competence.) In either case the law is tyrannical, and a tyran-

nical law not being according to reason, is not absolutely speaking a law, but rather a perversion of law.* For no authority is licensed to set reason aside.

Inborn is man's demand for reason. Inborn too is his demand for liberty. The right use of reason tells man that to preserve any liberty at all in this his fallen state, authority is needed. Right reason also tells him that because of this fallen state reason, liberty, and authority are all abused by him. And because authority is often abused it is often detested.

"father" is the keyword

Even that authority which seems closest to nature's plan, that of the father over his family, is frequently abused and frequently hated. Perhaps more hated than abused, for in this age there assuredly are more youngsters who dislike their parents than parents who browbeat their young. This is no doubt a reaction against the excessive severity of an earlier time. A severity which was justified in a primitive period when the three forms of authority were as yet undivided. This multiple authority we call patriarchal, and its archetype is Abraham. Instructed directly by God, Abraham imparted the faith to his household, ordered his family and ruled his servants. The right of life and death, which the patriarchs properly wielded, survived until the increasing effectiveness of the civil authority took the administration of justice out of private hands. Severity was further softened by the spread of Christianity which emphasized the spiritual importance of marriage and procreation. It thus increased the responsibility of parents while it in no way diminished the obligations of children. For we know that not a jot or a tittle of the law was altered and the commandment to honor father and mother stands for all time. Watching the growth of authority from the undifferentiated patriarchal to the present plural type we see that the political derives from the parental. (Not as a branch grows from a tree but as a seed drops from the tree and grows up beside it.) For both are from God, the Father of all.

Father is the keyword in this matter. Yet fatherliness today has become almost a smearword. No label carries more dishonor than "paternalism." Stamp an enterprise, a government or a law "paternalistic" and it is damned without a trial. It is true the word was some-

* St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, IIae, Q. 92, art. 1, obj. 4.

times misused, as "charity" too was misused, to describe the pittances hard Victorian hypocrites doled out as gifts to the workers their greed had pauperized.

But there is more than the just grievance of a past generation behind this semantic ire. There is discernible in many places a violence against *fatherness* which points to a disease in the very seed of our being. Its most striking instance is in psychology. The dredgings of psychoanalysis come up with so much wrack of father-hate and father-fear that it must fill the deeps of the analyst as well as the depths of the analyzed. Wherever we come on it, in psychology or sociology, this father-aborrence is significant of sickness. There lies stored up in this hatred of the transmitter of life hatred of life itself and therefore hatred of its Prime Cause. This horror of life grows from bottomless disgust, utter despair of any good to come, here or hereafter.* *And at the root of this disgust lies our rejection of authority.*

rejection of authority

At first sight this statement just seems to close the somber circle round us: we hate fatherhood because we hate life and we hate life because we reject the authority of the first Father. But life *is* hateful when it is disordered. For true order, we know, is harmony, and harmony is the condition of happiness. We have seen that without civil authority there is no civilized life, so without paternal authority there is no true family life and without religious authority there is no inner life that is sound. Whether it is in the State or in the home—and there lies our present matter—harmony depends on order and order on authority and that again to be viable depends on the recognition of its justice by the ruled. Not indeed of the just manner in which the authority is exercised, but of the legitimacy of its existence. This is a kind of remote "consent of the governed," but it does not at all mean that consent should be wooed. On the contrary, it is emphatically necessary that the principle of the authority be honored before its methods are scrutinized. In a home as in a State, with the best will in the world, authority is prone to err. Only agreement on the fact of original sin and a common cult of Christian humility permit the frank avowal of mistakes, but such admissions are possible only under the safeguard of acknowledged and honored authority.

*This hopelessness or nihilism was treated at some length in the April 1953 issue of *Integrity*.

As long as every breath of political wind is able to dislodge a public servant he will normally try to cover up his mistakes, which will therefore stay uncorrected. So parents too, when their position is undermined by the children's right of veto, take refuge in dissembling and stoop to bribery. Thus, although authority is often misused the absence of authority lets in an even greater flood of perils. The parents whose right to command is admitted may make as many mistakes as those whose directives are constantly queried. And these mistakes may make their children as justifiably angry. But their reactions are less likely to harm them both. Children who make a habit of obedience are less likely to dash out into a bar—or into the path of a car—than those who are habitually willful.

Police records show that the only part of our population with *no* delinquent children are the Chinese. They have preserved the ancient respect for age and the veneration of parents which is the foundation of a peaceful and harmonious home. The Chinese child may dislike the authority of his parents but does not question it and the Chinese parent never dreams of wooing the child's approval as so many of our well-meaning and well-trained parents do. It is pitiful to watch the patient tactics certain mothers use to win their child's compliance in some small matter which should be settled with a single word. They are obliged by the insecurity of their position to expend a world of effort on the trivialities of every moment and all their kindly wiles are worn out when it comes to graver things. It is sad to see fathers appeal to their children like politicians in election year, making promises it would be foolish to keep and evil to break.

Whether politician or parent, the demagogue, no matter how well intentioned, ultimately earns the contempt of his audience. The fiction of total freedom breaks against the iron bars of reality and the children who have watched the blowing up of this iridescent bubble are balked when they put out their hands to touch it. The young find words a poor substitute for deeds. Even the reasonable philosophic words with which kindly parents seek to persuade them to ethical conformity. No parent ever has the right to flout the child's reason any more than its sense of truth and sense of justice. If these laws are broken, authority is turned to tyranny. We must meticulously respect children's reason but we cannot expect the very young and very much alive to follow our dusty reasoning.

The loving parents who bore their children with speeches—as well as those who bribe them with concessions—say they want the child's

compliance to come from affection unmixed with fear. Yet it is a crushing strain upon affection to build family life on it alone. For it is only perfect love which casts out fear and perfect love is rare in a far from perfect world. A touch of fear—in the old sense of awe and reverence—is needed to preserve those distances which play an essential part in harmony, and which let love spread out its wings. Egalitarian relations between parents and children make for close huddling followed by explosions—very ruffling to the delicate feathers of love.

There always were and will be unnatural and monstrous parents whom it is impossible to love, and who are heartily hated by their offspring. Since the Emancipation of Children however, this hatred seems to creep into even the most affectionate and reasonable families and to be felt toward the most generous, least interfering of parents. This is not really strange; the very small cannot be expected to invent love for themselves. Unless it is taught them in the form of enforced unselfishness, few of them will learn it. They soon lose the dependent clinging of their early years—which parents like to mistake for love—and they have nothing left but an appetite for life and fury at restraint.

one fundamental secret

It is natural for parents to love their young. It is less natural for children to love their parents. Nowhere does religion command us to love our own children; it is assumed that we will. But God very emphatically orders us to honor our parents. Not to love them—that may not be possible on the human level—but to show reverence to that natural authority which governs our early lives and can never be totally ignored. There is even a condition attached to this command as there is not to the others: "that ye may live long in the land." As if there lay in this respect for parental authority some fundamental secret of social harmony and political permanence which alone could save communities from decadence and destruction. We know that the Books of Wisdom never tire of praising discipline. We know too that Jesus, in spite of the importance of His Father's business, dropped it "and He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."

As St. Bernard says: "A God becomes subject to men. . . . O Man, . . . surely it will not be beneath you to follow your Creator." But still children refuse discipline, because parents fear to impose it. They doubt their right to impose anything. Let them remember the example

of Joseph, Mary and Jesus—Whose high origin had been explicitly announced to His mother and foster father—and how they did not hesitate to command nor He to obey. But they did so gently and freely and so must we, “not provoking our children to anger,” and sometimes “growing angry ourselves but not sinning.” In dealing with children parents must be unvaryingly truthful, reasonable, and just; that their children may find it easy to honor them, and that they may all have “freedom under authority” which is in very truth the liberty of the children of God.

Kathryn Estel Sargeant

Laetare Sunday

Rejoice, O Sion, sing a new hymn unto your God,
Let the golden trumpets declare His wondrous works.
Oh, Jerusalem, you are reborn unto a new Life,
For that which was barren will give forth fruit.
The plain has become as a fertile field shining in the sun.

Rejoice, my people, rejoice in the midst of your suffering.
For the slave with the jingling bracelets
Is cast off. Sina has trembled and lain still;
The son of bondage has been made to give way,
And the rightful heir will rule gloriously in the land.

Rejoice, my people, rejoice in the midst of your suffering.
Weep no more; but lift up your tear-stained
Faces to Him Who triumphs in His sorrow.
Freedom will spring forth as the green April grass,
Drinking deeply of His love that falls as gentle rain.

Rejoice, O world, for the day is yet young.
Let us rise up to partake of the bread which
He will give us. Sing and rejoice with the Lord.
Let His peace give us strength. For even in tribulation
Will the Lord lift up our hearts unto Himself.

book reviews

THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION

by Justus George Lawler, Newman, \$3.00

A collection of significant and compelling essays, *The Christian Imagination* justifies the role of the layman in expounding theology. For here in a simple, direct yet comprehensive manner, Mr. Lawler, a member of the faculty of religion at St. John's University, Minnesota, studies some aspects of Christian life and dogma in the light of certain unvarying principles. In fact, the author refers to the essays as meditations—meditations on "that spirit in which we have our freedom." And Mr. Lawler treats of that spirit as evidenced in love, in marriage, in personal growth and education; in the principle of continuity which makes tradition in the liturgy (so beautifully referred to as the physical expression of the love of the Church for Christ).

The first section of the book, entitled "The Return to Tradition," contains three provocative essays discussing the effect the subjective trend which is the negation of tradition has upon philosophy, theology and education. Cramped, bounded by the flux, change, peculiarities of a particular time and place, the pure flow of authentic Christian tradition is too often adulterated or lost. One consequence of this, the ghetto mentality, is interestingly analyzed in all its rigidity and narrowness of outlook which "creates an obsessive family loyalty to things nominally or materially Roman Catholic. It is this party spirit which makes the pure faith of Christ, which is possessed by the one true Church alone, appear as something capable of competing for the souls of men on an equal plane with other 'religions.'"

In the second part of the book, "The Faith and Contemporary Man," Mr. Lawler defines the role of the reformer in the Church, describing the principle of dual fidelity—the absolute obedience due to any positive prescription of the Church, together with the initiative to pray and work for the restoration of the authentic tradition in every aspect of Christian life. "A true concept of obedience which will allow free play to initiative and yet be capable of demanding complete submission to constituted religious authority must be inculcated."

Of great interest to this reviewer was the essay on the "Christian Formation of Youth," in which the author discusses the present concern in education with techniques, facts, doing, to the neglect of the essence, spirit, being. Such a concept of education distorts and cramps "young minds under the guise of educating them for daily life. Daily life,

however, is not worth being educated for; rather educate young people to be complete men and women, confident of their spiritual powers, capable of understanding new situations as they arise, and of contemplating and loving the true, the good and the beautiful. Given all this, young people will be able to survive daily life; they will be able to pass through the world of doing—the world of daily life—because they are living interiorly in the world of being.”

Mr. Lawler warns against the dangers inherent in an educational system in which the overwhelming emphasis is placed on science and technology. Such a curriculum produces a mentality which assumes that all the mysteries of life are easily understandable and soluble; there is no humility before the mystery of being, no wisdom which, after all, is the only control for science. “Our young people, nurtured in a predominantly scientific culture, lacking in reverence for being, will achieve only works of destruction: either the destruction of their own inner spiritual resources, or the destruction of the world of nature about them.”

But enough of quotations; these should suffice to reveal Mr. Lawler’s perceptive handling of each challenging subject in this most readable collection of essays.

Dorothy La Barbera

THE LIFE OF ST. LOUIS

by John of Joinville, trans. by Rene Hague, Sheed & Ward,
\$3.75

THE MONGOL MISSION

trans. by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey, Sheed & Ward, \$4.00

THE RETRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC

by Regine Pernoud, trans. by J. M. Cohen, Harcourt, Brace,
\$4.75

Sheed & Ward announced in 1954 “The Makers of Christendom Series,” contemporary biographical documents, translated in an attempt to “help Christians to an awareness of the richness of the cultural tradition which they inherit.” The second pair of volumes, published late in 1955, contains material from the thirteenth century.

The Life of St. Louis was written by John of Joinville, one of the French barons who had served with the king on the Crusade in the Holy Land, to “record the great deeds and sayings” of the king. The punishment of knights who swore, the ostracism of the knight found in a brothel, Joinville’s unusual military contract with St. Louis, and Joinville’s refusal to perform the traditional Maundy Thursday washing

of the feet of the poor are all examples of the deeds which Joinville engagingly records.

The Mongol Mission contains the accounts of the mendicants who, especially in the decade after 1245, travelled to the court of the Great Khan. The contact had both religious and political aims. The conversion of the pagans in the northwestern corner of Europe was practically complete; for two hundred years missionary activity was increasingly directed eastward. The political goal was the cessation of Mongol attacks on the Russians and other Christian peoples. Although neither goal was achieved, the journeys were important as both missionary and cultural incidents.

From the viewpoint of subject matter the two books are of somewhat restricted interest. The same events could be found discussed in any good secondary account with a penetration more profound and a perspective more accurate than that found in the primary sources. Is there, then, any value in making the primary sources available to non-specialists? It seems that there is; not so much, of course, for the events presented as for a glimpse at how they appeared to contemporaries. From this point of view, the reader is interested less in what Joinville tells us about St. Louis, than in what Joinville tells us about Joinville.

Regine Pernoud, in *The Retrial of Joan of Arc*, has also used the primary sources to tell about another great French saint. The purpose is once again to present to non-specialists the material on which specialists base their accounts. Because the records of the retrial fill many volumes, however, Regine Pernoud has selected more important parts and joined them by means of a running commentary.

The records are entirely from the re-examination of Joan thirty years after her death, when papal commissioners not only retried Joan, but also examined the impartiality of the first trial. As in Joinville's account of St. Louis, it is most interesting to see her sanctity obscurely reflected in the eyes of her contemporaries.

The records of the rehabilitation, however, have an historical importance of their own: Cardinal d'Estouteville and Brehal, who conducted the retrial, have been accused of being no more impartial than were her judges at the first trial. This accusation is based on the fact that the rehabilitation, which enhanced both French and papal prestige, was conducted by men who were resolute partisans of Charles VII and of the Pope. The treatment of this problem is the one weakness in an otherwise excellent book. Mme. Pernoud argues correctly that although the commissioners in charge of the retrial might have been influenced by their political preferences, this partisanship was not the decisive factor in the rehabilitation. But in a book which is osten-

sibly presenting the documents of the retrial in order to enable the reader to form his own judgment, it would be less exasperating to find these arguments in an appendix, rather than spread intermittently in text and in footnotes. This, however, is a minor fault in an important contribution to modern interest in Joan of Arc and in Christian culture.

Hugh Fallon

ALL MANNER OF MEN

edited by Riley Hughes, Kenedy, \$3.50

Everyone knows that the American writer's medium is, par excellence, the short story. This medium has been used to superb advantage a hundred times, from the rugged starkness of Hemingway to the tender charm of Salinger. Thus, it is in a puzzled and saddened frame of mind that one lays aside *All Manner of Men*, a volume of short stories subtitled "Representative Fiction from the American Catholic Press: Stories of the 1950's."

A great French writer who was a cynic remarked: "One does not make good literature with fine sentiments." This is deeply true. But this reviewer's contention is that these very inadequate Catholic stories taken as a whole do not even express very fine feelings. The story is often trite, maudlin or simply secular, the style pedestrian, the situation hackneyed. And when there is a dash of imagination, the result is frankly contrived.

The editor presents the first story, "Jerusalem: The Fifteenth Nisan" by Charles Brady, with great pride and fondly asserts that it far outdistances Anatole France, in a similar realm. But whoever remembers that little gem of understatement, "The Procurator of Judea"—the more impressive because it is written by an unbeliever—and compares it with the childish fancy of describing the sudden death of a lamb about to be slaughtered (and doubtless deadly frightened) and the uneasiness of Pilate's pet lion, one certain Friday at three o'clock of the afternoon, will hardly assent.

A gushing girl thinks two boys divine and doesn't know whom she loves best, so she goes to confession and Father Moore, after patiently listening to how many times and how long Joe or Jim has held her hand, dogmatically assures her that a third one will come along and perhaps be the one and only. I fear that enemies of our faith or would-be converts could hardly realize from this the awe and splendor of sacraments or the wisdom of priests and the role they play in our lives. Or then an old man breaks a pretty cup and his daughter-in-law, after a terrible inner fight and an awful dream prophesying his death, mag-

nanimously forgives him. Does this make the Redemption a living wonder? And the stories relating to nuns would make the two St. Teresas rise from their graves.

Exceptions must be made for "The New York Girls" by Joseph Dever, without one Catholic undertone but well done. "Molly on the Shore," by Kevin Quinn is a beautiful story well told, excepting the end, where the dotted i's delete from the poetry of the whole. And "Gone to Freedom," by J. G. E. Hopkins, though not very original as to theme, is filled with mounting suspense and real compassion, a Catholic story.

As for "The Password," by Jerem O'Sullivan-Barra, I think that the author who writes such thoughtful and admirable articles did not intend it exactly to bear the label of fiction. It is more of a case history.

The editor, who writes a very intelligent introduction on the role of Catholics in letters, reveals, it would seem, the reason why American Catholic fiction is generally dissatisfactory while American and Irish fiction are outstandingly good, when he says that the stories were all written and intended to fit the demands of Catholic magazines.

No one can sit down to write a Catholic story; nothing beautiful was ever produced when a point has to be proved and propaganda aired. A good story-teller, who is a Catholic or steeped in Catholic tradition, will write a very different story from his secular counterpart; but first and foremost he has to write well and to write about what has been for him true emotion and experience, thus transmitting his vision to a public keyed to the writer by the link of faith. But he has to have been in some way deeply moved intellectually or emotionally by his subject. Some people will rush in where St. John of the Cross would hesitate, for Mass may be described from the outside, with indifference, and with all the living miracle left out of it. Conversely a man may pause before a tree swaying in the wind and, if he be haunted by God, may receive from it the impression of the fruit of knowledge. One day he may write down this experience and be able to give it to others. All things are catholic, because made by God and the range of subjects is inexhaustible. The only rule is to be true to oneself.

Anne Taillefer

GRACEFUL LIVING

by John Fearon, O.P., Newman, \$2.50

Since our earliest catechism days we have all been able to define the sacraments as outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. Unlike most of us, St. Thomas Aquinas went much further, and the treasure of his teaching is admirably transmitted to us in *Graceful Living* by Father John Fearon, O.P.

The author more than fulfills his intention of giving a "Deems Taylor type" course in appreciation of the sacraments—to illustrate "that they are masterpieces of Christ Himself, beautiful, persuasive, and powerful." Father Fearon delights and instructs us in showing the beauty and meaning contained in the sacraments by reason of the wisdom and artistry of Him Who fashioned them that we might have a more abundant life.

In our natural life the important events are birth, growth, nourishment, health, love, and death. Men have gradually developed the graceful arts of participating in these events—from the bedside manner to the champagne toast. This more abundant life we live as Christians furnishes comparable events. Christ instituted the sacraments to deal with these events and their accompanying problems in a way most suitable to our nature—to our needs, our faults, our fears and our hopes. Thus the sacraments are the graceful arts of God dealing with men.

But the sacraments are not just beautiful, they are instructive, they are signs. And Christ, by means of these signs, teaches us what He is doing and how we can benefit. Over and above this, the sacraments give grace; each sacrament gives a special kind of grace, and some give a character. Father Fearon explores these varied aspects of each sacrament in fifteen chapters with such interesting titles as, "A String around the Finger," "Sinners' Delight," and "Real Presents." Particularly good, I thought, are the chapters on confirmation—the sacrament so easily forgotten, and on penance with its moving treatment of the prodigal son. For the author this book expresses the fruits of many hours of study and meditation. It should lead us to the same, and thence to a capability for more graceful living.

James Lamm

PARISH PRIEST

by Eugene Masure, Fides, \$3.95

The position of the parish priest in the Church is not understood today. To many the ideal of the priesthood is some missionary society or a particular order of priests, that hold out a very adventurous and romantic life for its members. As a concrete example, the other day I was called to give a talk and they wanted a short biographical sketch for advance publicity. The charming lady at the other end of the wire asked, did I not belong to some order, was I just a secular priest?

For too many the parish priest is just a priest, tolerated and rather necessary, not a really generous priest like the missionaries, and maybe not intelligent enough to be a Jesuit and so he had to settle with being

a parish priest. This popular misunderstanding of the role of the parish priest can have a harmful effect not only on the laity but even on the parish priest himself if it makes him feel that he can be satisfied with a mediocre priesthood. We fail so often in the Church today to see that the parish priest most concretely represents Christ as he walks about his parish. There is a failure to see the parish priest in the main stream of the Mystical Body, in the stream of God's grace to mankind. The parish priest is the ordinary avenue God uses to work in His Church—here we have the basic indispensable priesthood. No other order or group of priests take his place in the Body of Christ.

To point out the place and examine the sanctity of the parish priest, this book was written. It was with great hope then that I opened its pages. While Canon Masure, the director of the Grand Seminary of Lille, France, makes a needed contribution to this important subject his is not the definitive work I had hoped and prayed for. The Canon is not a very clear and lucid writer as those who have read his other works may know. After stating his principle he gets involved in extending and explaining the principle and leaves the ordinary reader feeling he does not fully understand it all himself.

The book itself is divided into two parts—Part one is headed "The Priesthood" with chapters on the "Priesthood of Christ," "The Priesthood in the Church," "The Priesthood of the Apostles," "The Priesthood of the Eucharist and its Sacerdotal Significance," "The Priesthood of the Bishop," "The Priesthood of the Simple Priest," "The Grace of the Sacrament of Order," "On the State of Perfection of the Bishop and of the Priest," "The Priest and Catholic Action."

Part two is headed "Priestly Spirituality" and has chapters dealing with different systems of spirituality, and shows where the spirituality of the parish priest fits into the general schema of spirituality. It also has chapters dealing with the necessary asceticism and action in the priest's life with a section devoted to the place and sense of community in the spirituality of the parish priest. The last part of the book is a beautiful section containing documents supporting the conclusions of the writer and certainly making clear to all who read it the dignity of the parish priest.

To get the most from the book it would be best to start with the last section, reading the supporting documents and then reading part two on "Priestly Spirituality," which is the fruit of the personal experience of Canon Masure and the French clergy in the revival of the Church in France. The writer points out that the spirituality of the priest is different from the spirituality of monks or friars or priests bound together in orders. The basis for the spirituality of the parish priest is different. Here the Canon quotes Archbishop Guerry on the

three characteristic marks of clerical spirituality: (1) The bond with the bishop, who is father of his priests. (2) The community of the diocese. (3) The pastoral mission. It is this last, the mission of the parish priest to the people of his parish, which makes the spirituality of the parish priest different in its manifestation. The parish priest borrows exercises such as meditation, spiritual reading, his rosary and breviary from the spirituality of others. I even doubt that he borrows them, but he certainly uses them as others do. But his spirituality must be definitely formed by his mission to the people of his parish.

Canon Masure's book is one every parish priest could read with much profit. It will enable him to get a deeper understanding of his own glorious priesthood—the priesthood of Christ Himself.

James P. Cassidy



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